

BRIEF

Article Club to Encourage Meaningful and Impactful Conversations on Leadership Among Pharmacy Faculty and Staff

Lea S. Eiland, PharmD, Sylvia E. Rogers, PhD

Auburn University, Harrison School of Pharmacy, Auburn, Alabama

Submitted December 14, 2020; accepted July 6, 2021; published February 2022

Objective. To describe outcomes from an article club that was designed to foster leadership within a pharmacy school by informally gathering interested faculty and staff and providing a safe environment for discussion on leadership concepts.

Methods. At each monthly meeting, participants discussed an article from *Harvard Business Review*'s top 10 leadership articles. After 10 sessions, participants were asked to complete an electronic survey about their perspectives on the activities and invited to participate in an interview. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and qualitative software was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Videoconferencing allowed for off-campus faculty and staff participation. No direct programmatic costs were incurred.

Results. Four to 24 participants attended each session. Sixteen participants completed the survey, and five volunteered to be interviewed. All participants strongly agreed that the sessions increased awareness of leadership concepts, and 15 strongly agreed or agreed that the activities influenced their leadership decision-making and facilitated building a culture of leadership at the school. Interviews revealed that mid-career faculty participated to learn about general leadership concepts from discussions and a few junior faculty participated to gain leadership skills to help with promotion. All participants noted they were exposed to novel leadership styles by participating in the article discussion sessions. Teaching and practice commitments were the two reasons most often given for not participating.

Conclusion. Providing an interactive discussion forum for pharmacy education faculty and staff to learn and discuss leadership concepts and qualities is effective for personal growth and professional development. Other schools and institutions can implement similar activities to foster leadership.

Keywords: development, faculty, leadership, staff, workforce

INTRODUCTION

Many faculty and staff in higher education desire leadership training for career advancement; however, attending formal leadership programs may not be possible because of personal or professional barriers. In an American College of Clinical Pharmacy white paper, Boyce and colleagues recommended that developing leadership abilities be a component of faculty development programs for pharmacy practice faculty.¹ Specifically, leadership definitions, theories, abilities, and styles were proposed for discussion. The authors stated leadership development would enhance faculty members' ability to complete their various responsibilities and be beneficial for promotion and tenure. Institutions may host periodic leadership development activities, such as day-long seminars. However, participants may avoid activities that require longer

time commitments because of time constraints and professional responsibilities.

Book and journal clubs are organizational activities that can facilitate the development of leadership skills.²⁻⁷ Example processes for conducting these activities have been described for pharmacy students, residents, and new practitioners.^{6,7} However, outcomes using this method for leadership development for faculty and staff have not been published in the pharmacy literature.

A pharmacy practice faculty member at the Harrison School of Pharmacy developed a leadership article club. They decided on having an article club rather than a journal or book club because of the greater amount of time required for participation in these activities. Leadership topics were not part of the school's faculty development activities, and the organizer saw a need to support leadership growth and development. Also, a priority of the school's new strategic plan was to "establish a culture of community that empowers faculty and staff to become leaders, achieve professional excellence, and attain personal

Corresponding Author: Lea S. Eiland, Auburn University, Harrison School of Pharmacy, 2316 Walker Building, Auburn, AL 36849. Tel: 334-844-4033. Email: eilanls@auburn.edu

fulfillment.”⁸ Through informal inquiry, other faculty members showed interest in a monthly article discussion rather than a book club format due to a perceived lack of time. The monthly leadership article club was designed to foster leadership within the pharmacy school by informally gathering interested faculty and staff to discuss leadership concepts in a safe environment. This study evaluated participants’ perspectives on this informal leadership development activity. The successes and challenges of designing and conducting this activity are presented.

METHODS

This leadership development activity began in July 2018. Pharmacy faculty and graduate students were invited to participate via an email and calendar appointment. Starting in January 2019, staff were also invited to participate.

For the 2018-2019 series, the organizer assigned one article per month from the *Harvard Business Review’s* book *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Leadership*.⁹ Articles were made available via a cloud content management system (Box, Inc) and accessed through a web link included in the email and calendar appointment. The articles chosen were independent of each other, and only one article was discussed per session. This allowed flexibility in attendance as participants were not required to have attended a prior session to be able to understand and apply the topic. The organizer prepared seven to eight reflective questions for each discussion session. The sessions were one hour (12:00-1:00 PM central time) and conducted via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications), a video conferencing system, allowing attendees from the main, satellite, and six regional campuses to participate.

After 10 sessions (July-November, January-May), participants who attended at least one session were invited to complete a 20-item electronic anonymous questionnaire about their perspectives on the activity. For one survey item (Table 2), permission was obtained to use six verbatim and seven modified statements from a published nursing journal club activity.⁴ Participants could also volunteer to participate in an interview to share additional thoughts, attitudes, and perspectives. One of the authors met with each volunteer for 30 minutes to 1 hour and asked 13 open-ended questions about their views of the activities, personal leadership goals, and barriers to reaching those goals. The interviews were conducted using Zoom and recorded. Descriptive statistics were calculated from the quantitative data. Authors used the qualitative software QDA Miner Lite (Provalis Research) to code interview transcripts.

To analyze the qualitative data from the interviews, the authors conducted content analysis. Initially, the authors read the transcripts automatically generated from the video conferencing and corrected any errors. Next, authors coded each line of the transcripts using inductive in vivo coding in which short phrases from the interview were assigned codes.¹⁰ In vivo coding was used because the authors were interested in the participants’ perceptions rather than specific words or phrases. Codes were grouped into categories during and after initial coding. Last, authors combined the categories into overarching themes. This study was approved by the institutional research board.

RESULTS

Participants attended an average of five sessions, with four to 24 participants ($M=9.4$, $SD=6.2$) present at each session. Each session had remote-campus participants, including the organizer. Questionnaires were sent to 32 participants who attended at least one session. The response rate was 50%, with 16 participants completing the questionnaire and five faculty members volunteering for interviews. Most participants were from the pharmacy practice department, female, and had been faculty members for an average of 11 years (Table 1).

Attendees were asked perspectives on several statements related to the activities (Table 2). Overall, the participants believed the selected HBR articles were relevant. Six articles received a “very relevant” rating by all respondents who attended the session where that article was discussed. The other articles received the same rating by most respondents. Respondents agreed that the HBR articles selected for the first reading series were valuable. Participants commented that they liked the informal, safe, relaxed setting created for the activity, the discussion with others, hearing others’ perspectives, the dialogue with others outside their department, and the practical articles.

Teaching and practice commitments were the barriers to participation most often noted by attendees ($n=11$ and $n=9$, respectively). Two faculty noted having no barriers, while five other faculty cited that research commitments, service (committee) commitments, administrative responsibilities, maternity leave, or time was a barrier. Fourteen (93%) participants stated they would participate in the activity again, while one (7%) stated they would not.

Interviews revealed that mid-career faculty had participated to learn from the discussions, while a few junior faculty had participated to gain leadership skills to help them with promotion. One faculty member who had accepted a director position earlier that year commented that they participated in the leadership article club to help

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants in an Article Club Designed to Foster Leadership Among Pharmacy Faculty and Staff

	Participated in at least one session (n=32), No. (%)	Completed questionnaire (n=16), No. (%)
Role		
Faculty member	29 (91)	16 (100)
Administrator	5 (18)	1 (6)
Director	4 (14)	2 (13)
Graduate student	2 (6)	
Staff	1 (3)	
Department affiliation ^a		
Pharmacy Practice	21 (66)	14 (93)
Health Outcomes Research and Policy	6 (18)	1 (7)
Drug Development and Discovery	3 (9)	
Degree		
Bachelor of Science	4 (13)	4 (18)
Doctor of Pharmacy	22 (69)	15 (68)
Master of Science	1 (3)	1 (5)
Doctor of Philosophy	10 (3)	2 (9)
Gender		
Female	21 (66)	13 (81)
Male	11 (34)	3 (19)
Location		
Main campus	18 (56)	
Satellite campus	6 (19)	
Regional campus	8 (25)	
Years as a faculty member/staff		
0-5		4 (25)
6-10		4 (25)
11-15		2 (12)
15-20		6 (38)

^a One staff member was affiliated with administration and no specific department.

them in their new role. Participants felt the most valuable part of the activity was the discussion. Several noted that they were exposed to leadership styles they had previously been unaware of and that the article “Discovering Your Authentic Leadership” was the most valuable one.

DISCUSSION

In 2020, Fuentes called for pharmacy programs to develop succession plans and strong leadership pipelines.¹¹ The leadership article activity described here is one small step that could lead to a productive pathway for developing leaders. Pharmacy organizations provide formal leadership training programs for faculty interested in obtaining leadership positions. As leaders are needed for the profession’s future, schools must do their part in developing succession plans and training faculty and staff for

leadership positions within their institutions and the Academy. Implementing this activity could infuse leadership ideals throughout the organization. For instance, Rowlands and colleagues described an executive nursing leadership journal club that became incorporated into their institution’s culture and practice.³ Duffy and colleagues developed a leadership journal club for nurses to increase the awareness of evidence-based nursing leadership.⁴ Similar to our findings, nurses stated the activity increased their knowledge and perceived leadership competency.

This unique leadership development activity represents a successful strategy to engage faculty and staff in discussing leadership concepts and promote advancement. In general, participants who attended these sessions actively participated in the discussion, including the organizer. During each session, participants shared their opinions of the article, interpretation and application of

Table 2. Perspectives of Participants in an Article Club Designed to Foster Leadership Among Pharmacy Faculty and Staff (n=16)

The leadership article club...	Strongly agree, n (%)	Somewhat agree, n (%)	Neither agree nor disagree, n (%)	Somewhat disagree, n (%)	Strongly disagree, n (%)
Increased my awareness of leadership concepts	16 (100)	0	0	0	0
Reviewed relevant readings of leadership concepts	15 (94)	1 (6)	0	0	0
Presented content appropriate for my level of education	16 (100)	0	0	0	0
Created a safe environment for discussion of leadership concepts	15 (94)	1 (6)	0	0	0
Promoted dialogue of participants	15 (94)	1 (6)	0	0	0
Allowed me to ask questions effectively	14 (88)	2 (13)	0	0	0
Allowed me to express my opinions freely	14 (88)	2 (13)	0	0	0
Allowed me to comment on the article and/ or other's viewpoints	16 (100)	0	0	0	0
Discussion encouraged me to think about different viewpoints	14 (88)	2 (13)	0	0	0
Influenced my leadership decision making	9 (56)	6 (38)	1 (6)	0	0
Presented content that I could apply to my career	12 (81)	3 (19)	0	0	0
Will help me achieve a personal or professional goal	9 (56)	5 (31)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0
Maintained my interest	12 (75)	3 (19)	1 (6)	0	0
Prompted me to learn new and different information	14 (88)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0	0
Was worth the time I invested	14 (88)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0	0
Facilitated building a culture of leadership at the school	9 (56)	6 (38)	1 (6)	0	0
Allowed me to interact with other colleagues within the school	15 (94)	1 (6)	0	0	0
Added to my job satisfaction	8 (50)	6 (38)	2 (13)	0	0

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

The leadership article club...	Strongly agree, n (%)	Somewhat agree, n (%)	Neither agree nor disagree, n (%)	Somewhat disagree, n (%)	Strongly disagree, n (%)
Included effective teaching methods	11 (69)	4 (25)	1 (6)	0	0
Was conducted in a setting conducive to my needs	14 (88)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0	0
Was effectively conducted via videoconference	15 (94)	1 (6)	0	0	0
Was facilitated by a competent faculty member	16 (100)	0	0	0	0
Was conducted at an appropriate time interval (once monthly)	13 (81)	3 (19)	0	0	0

leadership concepts, and personal experiences. Based on the engagement level of returning participants, the organizers seemed to be successful in creating a comfortable and safe environment for discussion. As compared to Wombwell and colleagues' recommendations for conducting a leadership journal club, this activity was less structured, more informal, and focused on pharmacy school faculty and staff. Though the organizer prepared questions in advance, other discussion by participants was welcome. Participants could eat lunch during the session and were encouraged to attend even if they had not read the article beforehand. Additionally, the organizer focused on the *HBR* series, whereas Wombwell suggested using articles concentrated on six leadership areas.⁷

Twenty-four faculty members attended the first session, with one department head purchasing lunch for their six faculty members who attended. Although this was the highest attended session, not everyone actively participated in the discussion. In spring 2019, several faculty members were selected as directors in the school's new organizational structure. This may have increased participation as new directors may have wanted to improve their leadership skills. Other participants may have thought learning about leadership would provide opportunities to gain leadership positions within the school through succession planning or professional organizations; thus, strengthening their opportunities for promotion. Only one staff member attended; however, the sessions overlapped with staff members' lunch breaks. Having each session be independent of the other sessions allowed participants to attend as their schedule allowed. Attendance likely would have significantly decreased if attendance at prior sessions had been required.

Leadership development can be formal or informal and can be extrapolated from other non-healthcare professions. The *HBR* articles were effective in stimulating discussion and helping participants grow professionally and personally. The concepts of leadership definitions, theories, abilities, and styles that Boyce and colleagues recommended be included in faculty development were covered in the 10 *HBR* articles and allowed for comparison of concepts.¹ Participants stated the articles presented content that could be applied to their careers and would help them achieve personal and professional goals.

Gaufin and colleagues recommended facilitating leadership book clubs within the workplace as a practical and affordable activity.² Our leadership development activity only had a direct cost of time as the articles were available through the university library system, and the university's videoconference system was used. Participants rated the design, setting, and frequency of the sessions positively. This activity was implemented prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as many pharmacy faculty and staff shifted to working remotely in 2020 during the pandemic, this activity could have continued to be conducted in an entirely virtual or mixed (in-person and online) work environment as it was at our school.

This activity had social and cultural impacts. Social connectedness is important in a geographically divided school, and participants stated the activity allowed them to interact with their colleagues within the school. Most participants strongly agreed that the activity added to their job satisfaction and was worth the time invested, thereby increasing their sense of well-being. Similar to Rowlands and colleagues' outcomes, our participants felt the activity facilitated building a leadership culture

at the Harrison School of Pharmacy, which is part of the school's strategic plan.

As anticipated, teaching and practice commitments were the most noted attendance barriers. Most participants belonged to the pharmacy practice department, where faculty traditionally have heavy teaching and practice responsibilities. Medina and colleagues described a virtual online book club on various topics, including leadership, conducted within an academic pharmacy organization's special interest group.⁵ Similar to the book club,⁵ our activity also saw a higher interest initially, yet a smaller group participated throughout the rest of the sessions. This could be because the participants did not find the activity valuable or, as stated in the survey response, time was an issue. To increase engagement, participants were surveyed after the first session seeking the best day and time for future sessions. Most responded, leading the organizer to think the session was valuable, though not all responders attended future meetings.

Challenges to implementing this type of activity exist. This activity was conducted by one school and led by a faculty member with a passion for leadership. However, not all schools have someone to lead this type of activity. Also, faculty and staff leadership development may not be a focus in some programs. Attendees elected to participate in this activity, which suggests that they had an underlying level of interest in leadership. Participants were primarily from the pharmacy practice department, which is the school's largest department. Response rates to our survey and interview were low. As the activity is now completing its third year, long-term analysis and outcomes of personal leadership goals will be assessed.

CONCLUSION

As leaders are needed for the future of the pharmacy profession, schools must do their part in training faculty and staff for leadership positions. Providing a safe and

interactive discussion forum to learn and discuss leadership concepts and qualities is effective for personal growth and professional development. Other schools and institutions can implement similar activities to foster leadership within their program and the profession.

REFERENCES

1. Boyce EG, Burkiewicz JS, Haase MR, et al. ACCP white paper: Essential components of a faculty development program for pharmacy practice faculty. *Pharmacotherapy*. 2008;28(10):245e-268e. https://www.accp.com/docs/positions/whitePapers/FacDevWPFinal_nd.pdf. Accessed March 3, 2021.
2. Gaufin JR, Kennedy KI, Struthers ED. Practical and affordable ways to cultivate leadership in your organization. *J Public Health Manag Pract*. 2010;16(2):156-161.
3. Rowlands A, Winslow S. The executive nursing leadership journal club. *AORN J*. 2011;94(2):190-3.
4. Duffy JR, Thompson D, Hobbs T. Evidence-Based Nursing Leadership. *JONA*. 2011;41(10):422-427.
5. Medina MS, Garrison GD, Brazeau GA. Finding time for faculty development. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2010;74(10):Article 179.
6. Chappell A, Dervay K. Leadership Book Club: An Innovative Strategy to Incorporate Leadership Development Into Pharmacy Residency Programs. *Hosp Pharm*. 2016;51(8):635-638.
7. Wombwell E, Murray C, Davis SJ, Palmer K, Nayar M, Konkol J. Leadership journal club. *Am J Health Syst Pharm*. 2011;1;68(21):2026-2027.
8. Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy. 2019-2023 Strategic Plan. <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/pharmacy/about/pdf/strategic-plan.pdf> of Pharmacy Strategic Plan. Accessed March 3, 2021.
9. Harvard Business Review. *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership*. <https://store.hbr.org/product/hbr-s-10-must-reads-on-leadership-with-featured-article-what-makes-an-effective-executive-by-peter-f-drucker/12546>. Accessed March 3, 2021.
10. Miles MB, Huberman AM, Saldaña J. *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014.
11. Fuentes DG. Rethinking Our Approaches to Succession Planning and Developing A Leadership Pipeline. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2020; 84(12):8335.